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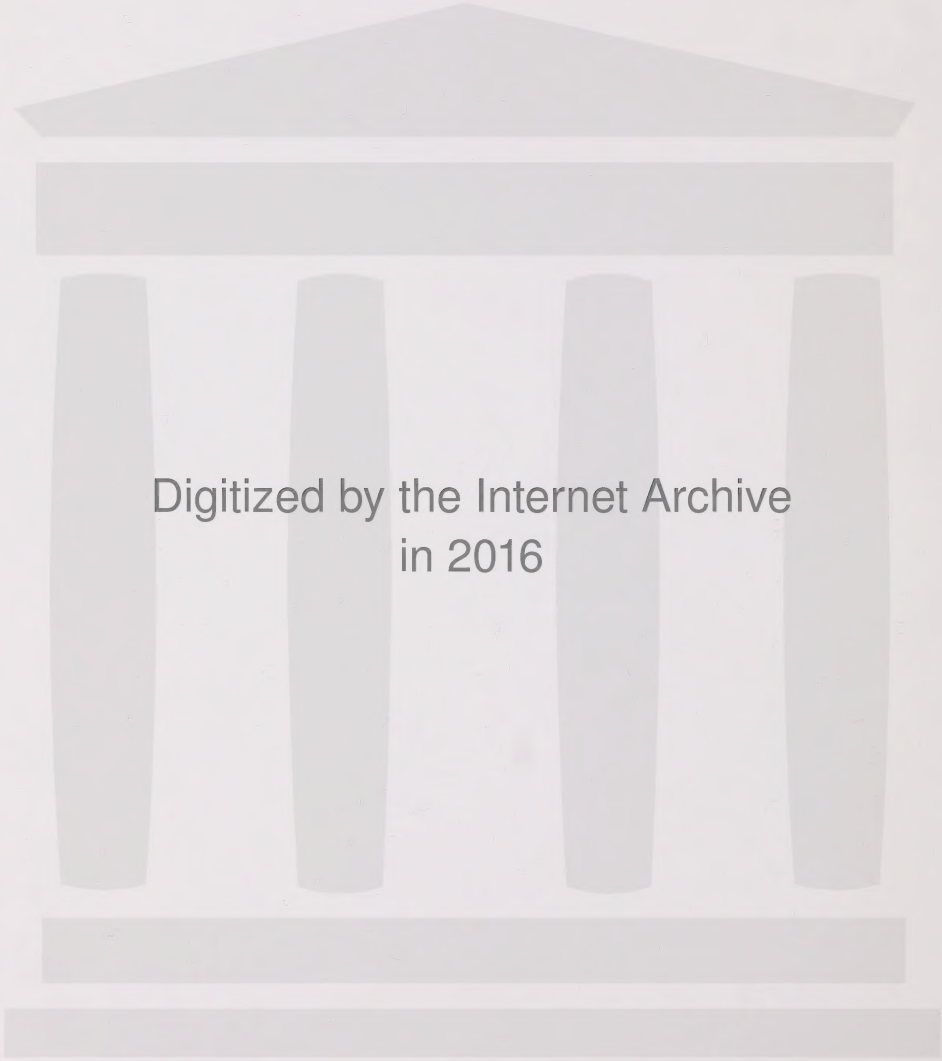




Handbook for Aboriginal Mentoring

what. why. how. who?

Alberta


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contents



WHAT? pg 1
Mentoring Defined 1
Mentoring Models 1
– One-to-one Mentoring 1
– Group Mentors 2
– Peer Mentors 3



WHY? pg 4
Role of Elders and Traditional Teachers 4
Aboriginal Identity, Heritage and Beliefs 5
Awareness and Understanding of Aboriginal Communities 5
Promises for Aboriginal Youth 6



HOW? pg 7
Needs Assessment 7
Program Goals and Objectives 8
Program Administration 8
Policies and Standards 9
– Recruiting and Screening Volunteers 9
– Orienting and Training Volunteers 10
– Matching Youth with Mentors 10
– Supervising and Supporting Mentoring Relationships 11
– Assessing Risks 11
– Evaluating the Program 11



WHO? pg 12
Identifying Youth 12
Establishing an Advisory Committee 12
Honouring the Family and Community 12
Enrolling Volunteers 13

RESOURCES pg 14
Checklist for Developing an Aboriginal Mentoring Program 14
Key Contacts 16
Websites 17
References 18

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what?

Aboriginal wisdom suggests that there are certain things without which young people cannot survive and flourish. Mentoring is one of them (Weinberger, 1999). Although the term mentor is uncommon in Aboriginal communities, the concept of mentoring is not. Mentoring preserves a way of life based on spirituality, sacredness, reciprocity, education and social responsibility by helping to integrate cultural factors that preserve and protect the health and well-being of the young (Weinberger, 1999). Mentoring is a primary intervention to prevent or address many of the problems that youth face today. By supporting and redirecting young people, mentoring focuses attention on successful behaviours and encourages the attainment of potential, provides direct assistance to young people, promotes school achievement and helps youth to avoid violence and abstain from drugs and alcohol.

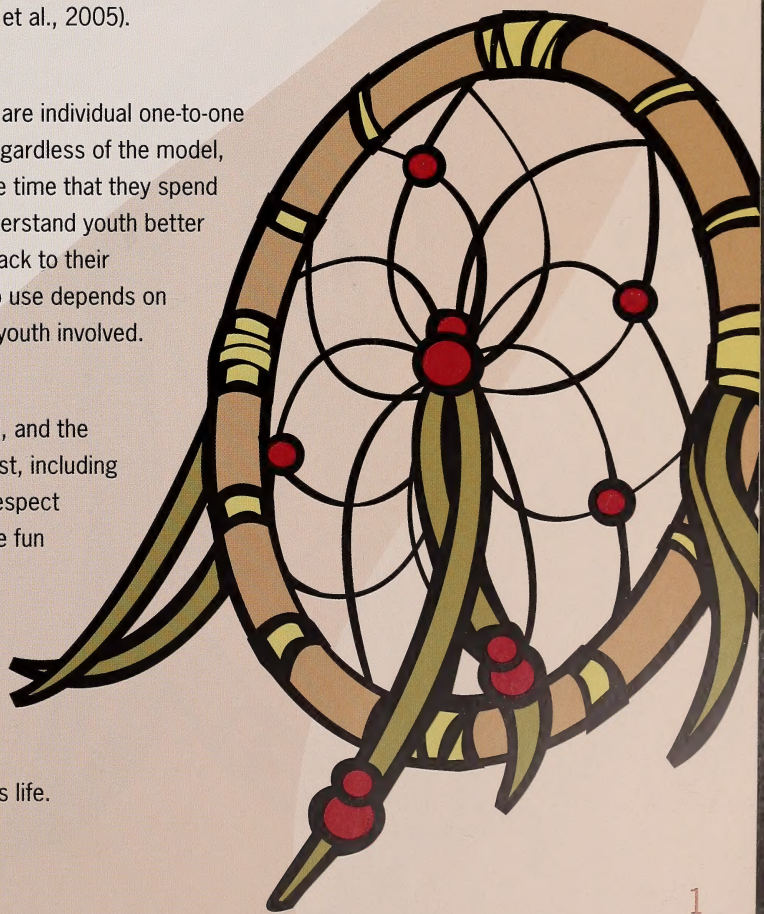
"A mentor is someone you look up to because you can see everything you want to be shining out through their eyes."

MENTORING DEFINED

A mentor is commonly defined as an individual who provides friendship, guidance, direction and support for children and youth outside their own families (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005). Historically, Aboriginal mentoring was embedded in cultural practice in which the entire society contributed to the raising and teaching of their young; yet today, many of the social and cultural systems and networks that once guided Aboriginal youth are no longer as central to community life (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005).

MENTORING MODELS

The most common mentoring models for young people are individual one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring and peer mentoring, but regardless of the model, mentors work with young people because they enjoy the time that they spend with them and believe that mentoring helps them to understand youth better (Jucovy, 2001). Mentors also want to give something back to their communities. The model that your program chooses to use depends on the number of available volunteers and the interests of youth involved.



ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING

One-to-one mentoring matches an individual with a child, and the programs are designed by those who know the child best, including the parents, teachers and the child. Mentors learn to respect the young person's viewpoint, plan opportunities to have fun together, and get to know the young person's family. Relationships that work are equal and more committed to mutual learning and benefit (Delaney et al., 2002). By involving families and making real-world connections to learning, mentors help to keep young people focused. Mentoring is most effective when mentors maintain a steady presence in a young person's life.

what?

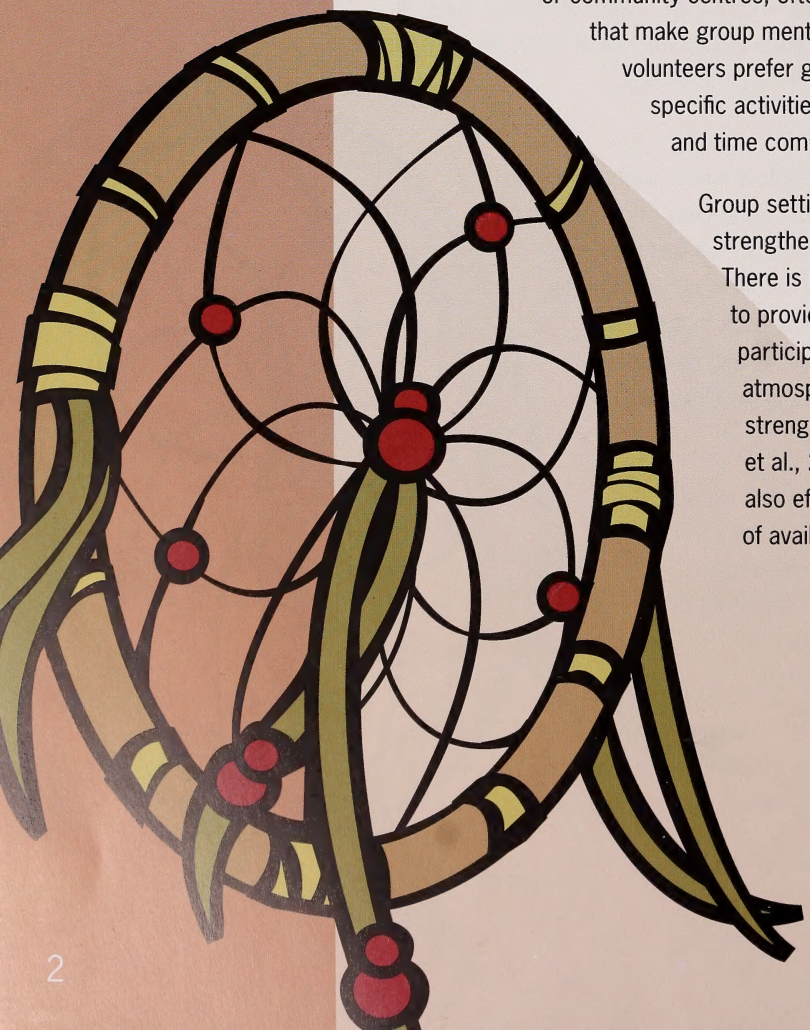
"Being a mentor is fulfilling, important and one of the greatest gifts I have ever received."

GROUP MENTORS

Group mentoring can be a particularly effective model for Aboriginal youth because groups are so fundamental to Aboriginal culture. The complexity and interweaving of social circles help Aboriginal people to relate to each other (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005). Group mentoring requires fewer volunteers, tends to be less expensive, and may reach youth who also want to interact with their peers and develop personal and social skills. Although the nature of the relationship between the mentor and the youth in groups tends not to be as strong as one-to-one mentoring, the vast majority of youth in these programs do not desire an exclusive one-to-one relationship with a mentor; rather, they are interested in opportunities to interact with their peers.

Group mentoring appeals to volunteers because there is not as much pressure to participate as there is in one-to-one mentoring models. Group programs tend to attract volunteers who do not apply to individual mentoring programs, in part because of the perceived safety and reduced risk that groups offer. Groups tend to meet in schools or community centres, often during daylight or early evening hours, features that make group mentoring attractive to older volunteers. Many volunteers prefer group mentoring because of the structure, the specific activities offered and their concerns about the intimacy and time commitments necessary for one-to-one mentoring.

Group settings allow mentors and youth to engage and strengthen their capacity by learning from each other. There is less pressure to be an expert in an area or to provide cultural guidance to the children. Mentors participate in group programming in a nonthreatening atmosphere in which they learn to offer their gifts and strengths to children and their community (Delaney et al., 2002; Herrera & Gale, 2002). Group mentoring is also effective in communities where the number of available volunteers is limited.



PEER MENTORS

Peer mentoring programs help young people to develop positive social networks that build self-confidence, support school adjustment and improve relationships with parents and families. Peer mentors help others develop social and friendship skills, serve as role models, scribes, and study buddies. Peers speak the same "language" and often have similar experiences (Alberta Education, 2005). Peer mentoring is beneficial to young people who are socially marginalized. Students who have good friends in whom they can confide and with whom they share activities are more likely to have confidence in themselves, to be well adjusted at school, and to get along with their parents (Kunz & Hanvey, 2000). Peer mentoring is particularly well suited to isolated youth.

Young people who have caring individuals in their lives learn to respond more positively to the challenges they face and are better able to take advantage of opportunities that will benefit them. Close relationships with caring individuals are critical to the healthy development of young people. Research has demonstrated that a relationship between a young person and a caring, supportive mentor can lead to positive changes in the young person's life (Jucovy, 2002).

The Alberta Aboriginal Mentoring Project in 2002 identified four desired outcomes from mentoring. The first was to increase the number of Aboriginal children served by effective mentoring programs; the second was to enhance the health, well-being and skill development of children through the presence of effective mentoring relationships; the third was to ensure mentoring relationships have appropriate supports that can also become important to families, and the fourth was to create knowledge and transfer this knowledge to government, the Aboriginal community, and other child and youth serving organizations (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

Mentoring pilot projects developed and evaluated in Alberta suggest that mentoring programs in Aboriginal communities can be as important for those who volunteer as for children and youth they serve because, while children are provided with guidance and opportunities for healthy engagement, mentors are provided with opportunities to grow and build confidence by being mentors and community leaders. Mentoring programs also strengthen the self-concept, self-worth and sense of purpose of the individuals who volunteer as mentors. Together, mentors and youth learn about and share culture and history in a nurturing, caring way (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

Aboriginal mentors who belong to and are supported by their communities serve as culturally appropriate points of contact for youth because they understand the role of family and family commitments, the importance of local Elders and traditional teachers and the nuances of how Aboriginal people relate to each other. Successful Aboriginal mentoring programs build upon personal, family and community resources for both the youth and the individuals who mentor them. These programs help to ground and connect youth and mentors to the tribal culture to which they belong by helping them to learn about their Aboriginal community and family; encouraging an appreciation for Elders and traditional teachers, grandparents and parents; and including Aboriginal history, language and culture in the program (Strand & Peacock, 2002).

Mentoring strengthens communities because talents are shared and resources are identified to create and support a unified group identity. It also maximizes human resources by engaging older individuals as volunteers to work with youth. Children, youth and older individuals are less alienated when they participate as contributing members of society. Elders and traditional teachers are able to share cultural traditions and values with younger generations to build a sense of personal and societal identity.



why?

Young people benefit by developing enhanced social skills through interacting with others. Communication skills are strengthened, and the attention young people are given improves their self-esteem, helps them to develop problem-solving skills and fosters friendships across generations. Children and youth in mentoring programs have positive role models with whom they can interact on a regular basis, and volunteers provide young people with consistency through mentoring.

Mentoring enhances socialization for the individuals who mentor by helping them to expand their sphere of influence. The increased interaction with children and youth and engagement with others helps to increase the mentors abilities to transmit cultural beliefs and values. Volunteers also benefit from stimulated learning opportunities where they are able to acquire skills from their younger counterparts to be able to use new innovations and technologies. Mentoring programs offer opportunities to participate in meaningful activities. Volunteers report their lives are enriched and that they feel a rejuvenated sense of purpose and increased coping skills, significant contributions to the maintenance of good health.

An additional benefit of Aboriginal mentoring is that young people are taught the importance of environmental stewardship and the ways of the land. Because environmental changes are difficult to observe, intergenerational dialogue helps Elders, traditional teachers and volunteers impart a long-term view of the environment that delves into the past and projects into the future.

ROLE OF ELDERS AND TRADITIONAL TEACHERS

Historically, Aboriginal people shared knowledge from one generation to the next through oral traditions or by telling and showing through songs, stories, group activities and games. Elders are very important in cultures because they promote an understanding and consideration of cultural perspectives while ensuring the continuity of sacred ceremonies, rituals and traditional teachings. Mentoring helps Elders and traditional teachers pass their knowledge and expertise to young people while encouraging mutual respect and integrating and strengthening traditional Aboriginal ways. According to Aboriginal beliefs, true happiness comes to those who dedicate their lives to the service of others. Structured mentoring programs support this by promoting social responsibility and providing a vehicle to share knowledge, sacred traditions and culture with youth facing challenges.

Mentoring programs that are successful gain the support from the political leadership in the community such as the Chief or Council and/or the leadership of a community organization which supports the project. Having Elders actively involved in mentoring programs helps ensure that the program will be more effective (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY, HERITAGE AND BELIEFS

Aboriginal people are defined by their history, and their identity is determined by their ancestry, frequently framed by a family's geographic origin. According to the 2001 Canadian Census, approximately 156,225 people in Alberta identify themselves as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2001). Although almost half of all Aboriginal people live in urban areas, Alberta has 43 First Nation's communities with many unique heritages, languages, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices.

Respect, kindness and sharing are fundamental to Aboriginal culture. Children are considered gifts from the Creator. For Aboriginal people, the words community and family are often interchangeable (Alberta Education, 2005). The task of raising the next generation is the responsibility of the whole community (Brendtro, et al., 1990). The capacity of individuals to have and respond to dreams is embedded in Aboriginal wisdom, which encourages people to take responsibility for and actively participate in the development of their potential and that of others. As individuals set out on a journey of self-development, they will be helped by guides, teachers and protectors. Guidance comes in many forms, including the words and actions of Elders and friends (Fiordo, 1988).

Worldviews permeate all aspects of Aboriginal life. They are "like stones thrown into the water from which other circles grow" (Alberta Education, 2005). For Aboriginal people, the circle represents the interconnectedness of all things, symbolizing balance, consensus, harmony, inclusion and unity. "We believe that beings thrive when there is a web of interconnectedness between the individual and the community, and between the community and nature" (Alberta Education, 2005). Aboriginal teaching emphasizes an approach to learning that is circular and holistic rather than linear, and the teacher is also the student. This was expressed by both Aboriginal youth and mentors as, "A mentor is not afraid to learn as well as teach," and "I love to mentor because the youth teach me."

Aboriginal communities have historically embraced problems and shared in the process of finding solutions. The concept of circle justice is attributed to Aboriginal practices of inviting honesty, encouraging responsibility and accepting accountability while healing and strengthening the community. The circle (Brendtro et al., 1990) represents the core concepts of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity as essential for the healthy development of young people and encourages Aboriginal community members to nurture the next generation while helping them toward mastery and independence.

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Historically, the concept of family in Aboriginal culture involved the entire village in sharing responsibility for food, shelter, transportation and childcare (Saxton, 2001). As times have changed, so have Aboriginal communities. According to one Elder, "We must always remember that culture is something that does not keep still; it develops through challenges and interactions of people and events or it becomes distorted and dies. It is the continuity of living culture that is important" (Alberta Education, 2005).

"I am not a sports star or politician, but just like those who have taken time from their 'other' lives, I am here to celebrate youth and celebrate the direction youth are going in Canada's greatest province."

"A mentor is like a chain... He does not just teach; he informs and inspires us so as to create another mentor. Knowledge is a continuum; we all learn and we all teach."

"Just knowing someone cares makes a difference."

"The flame that lights the way for the bright light of youth to shine."

"If mentors did not exist, I would not either. I would have given up hope if it were not for the inseparable love given to me."

why?

Aboriginal cultural changes have been dynamic. The same social issues that exist in the general population are also found in Aboriginal communities, but often with greater frequency or intensity, such as poverty, unemployment, language or educational barriers, disability, racial and cultural stereotyping, violence, gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of adequate housing, health concerns, and poor water quality (Statistics Canada, 2005). Children from families afflicted by such social problems are at greater risk of not becoming healthy, competent and productive.

Aboriginal people are survivors with a genius for adaptation and resourcefulness, an ancient people who have long inhabited Alberta. For thousands of years they depended on the herd to sustain their traditional way of life. Their communities were highly mobile and flexible, responding to patterns of herd migration. Aboriginal people continue to be highly mobile, yet today, frequent changes in residence tend to negatively impact a family's finances, relationships, access to extended family support and connections to community and schools. In fact, each time students change schools, their odds of leaving school early increase substantially (Smale, 2001).

PROMISES FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH

In traditional cultures, self-esteem is developed by a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. They highly value individual freedom, self-management, giving to others and giving back to their community (Strand & Peacock, 2002). Providing appropriate services to young people is the most effective means of addressing the problems of youth. All females, regardless of ethnic background, tend to assume more family obligations than do males (Smale,2001). This is true in Aboriginal families as well. Mentoring can have a powerful, positive impact on young women.

Mentoring helps young people to better understand the education, training and work options open to them and helps to connect youth to employment and community participation. Respecting and caring for others and being cared for and about are benefits for both young people and their mentors. An Aboriginal teacher stated, "When you take the time to talk to students, remember: the first moments are sacred; they involve the honouring of the dignity of each life. Take time to listen with your heart" (Alberta Education, 2005).

"The reason I am here is because the Elders in my community respect me for helping the youth in my community. I am here to make a difference."

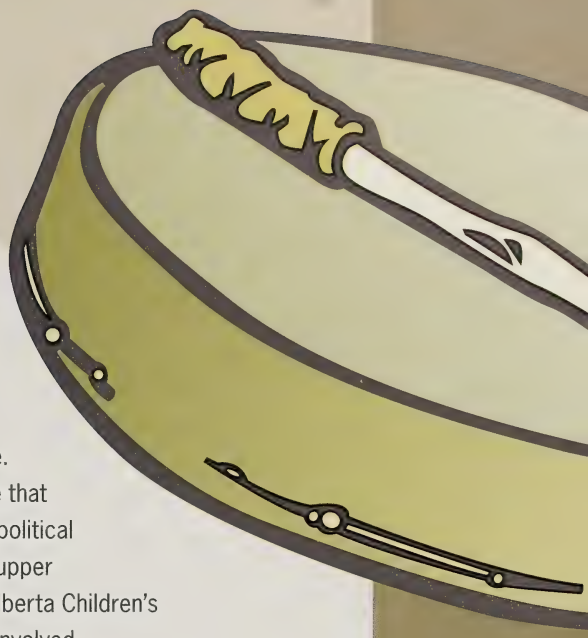
"In a world with negativity and stereotypes, a mentor guides you through troubles and connects you to a world where youth are respected and valued as future leaders and contributors to society."

"A mentor is someone who has faith in you and your abilities, especially when you do not, and in doing so, inspires you to reach for your dreams and teach others to reach for their worth and potential."

"I would not be here without a mentor. Being a teen parent has been an experience I will never ever forget. Without guidance from my mentors, I wouldn't have known that I still had a chance to go back to school and be successful."



how?



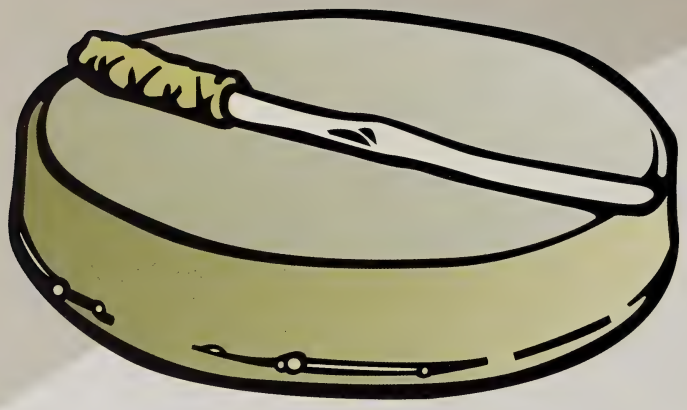
Quality mentoring produces significant, lasting, positive outcomes that meet the needs of young people, volunteers and the community (Ferronato, 2001). Safe and effective mentoring programs pay attention to program design and planning, program management, program operations and evaluation. In doing so, they develop, monitor and support matches and address problems that arise. The Aboriginal Mentoring Pilot Products Evaluation Report findings state that in order for a mentoring program to be successful, commitment of the political leadership in the community (Chief or Council), or the leadership of the upper management of the organization supporting the program is essential (Alberta Children's Services, 2006). Such leadership needs to be substantive and actively involved.

The websites listed in the Resources and Reference sections of this handbook list a variety of planning kits for mentoring programs, many with worksheets and checklists. It is important to remember that all program policies and practices should be clearly defined in writing and take into account the special needs and circumstances of Aboriginal youth.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Starting a mentoring program requires careful planning and organization, but it also requires verifying the need for a mentoring program in the community. The Aboriginal community must believe that a mentoring program is needed, otherwise, the program will not have the support or participation necessary (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

To assess the need, begin with local governance or community agencies, or conduct an environmental scan to identify local priorities, needs and opportunities relative to the youth in the community. Successful programs assess the need for mentoring, determine who is interested and establish plans for community involvement and support. Community awareness is especially important for Aboriginal mentoring programs to ensure appropriate recruitment of mentors and sufficient participation of youth (Alberta Children's Services, 2006). In assessing the need, it is important to identify the programs and resources that are already offered to children and young people in the community. Consider what is working well, what is not working well and what is missing. If certain children or young people are not being served by existing programs, determine why not. The mentoring program you decide to offer should consider the youth whom your program will serve and the type of mentoring that would best meet their needs. Mentoring can include one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring, or peer mentoring.



how?

PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Developing a clear statement about the purpose or mission of your mentoring program is critical. You should include the rationale or need for the mentoring program, the goals and outcomes you expect to achieve, how you will measure your success against those expectations, and your strategy for carrying out your program. Mission statements should be simple and answer questions such as, "What do you want to accomplish? How do you plan to accomplish these things and for whom?"

Having community groups serve as advisors to the program will help to secure community interest. By establishing clear goals and a program mission, your mentoring program will have the vision and clarity it needs to be effective in serving your target audience.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Findings from the Aboriginal Mentoring Pilot Project Evaluation Report link mentoring program success to the support of a host organization and the wider community (Alberta Children's Services, 2006). It is important to ensure community investment in the program, in terms of both money and time. Running an effective mentoring program costs money. Successful programs have the backing from the community and support from a community organization.

Budget, financial management and reporting systems must be developed for the program model that outlines how funds will be used and how the program will be sustained in the future to determine the amount of funding needed. Mentoring models that have proven to be effective include those in which funders support nonprofit agencies and organizations with clearly defined goals. These agencies or organizations carefully assess the youth and volunteers to establish appropriate matches with the most opportunity for success, offer activities designed to enrich and enhance experiences for youth and provide data to evaluate all aspects of the program (Novotney, et al., 2000).

Forming a resource development committee with members of the community, Elders and volunteers is important for the community. When community members take ownership of planning for and developing a mentoring program, there is a better chance of securing sufficient financial resources to maintain the program. The committee can investigate both current and potential external resources from foundations, government agencies, individuals, local businesses and special events. It should also assess external resources, including in-kind donations, volunteers time and other nonfinancial support. External support is critical for programs supported by organizations or communities without much experience in working with youth or delivering community programs (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

Suggestions for consideration in the mentoring program budgets include staffing costs for a program coordinator or secretarial assistance; operating costs for recruiting, postage, training materials and office supplies; and liability insurance. Community organizations that would partner with your program may already hold liability insurance that would meet your needs. Organizations such as community friendship centres may be good places to start. Additionally, screening fees (fingerprinting, criminal background check) and activity costs for such items as refreshments, games, craft supplies, sporting equipment, field trips, awards or recognitions and thank you gifts should be included in the budget. Some programs must pay rent and utilities, telephone costs and Internet expenses, but if you partner with another agency, these may be covered for your program.

POLICIES AND STANDARDS

Your mentoring program will need to establish policies, procedures and operations to ensure that your program meets your community's needs. Policies and procedures should be created for communicating and protecting the rights and safety of the youth and volunteers; managing risk; establishing record keeping procedures; interviewing and selecting mentors; and monitoring mentoring relationships. The program should carefully draft policies about contact between mentors and young people, being careful to prohibit activities such as overnight stays at mentors' homes.

You will also need to consider the kinds of information that you will need to collect about the youth you will serve and the mentors who volunteer. The structure of your program will determine what specific information is needed. Mentor applications should include demographic data, information for screening and matching, reasons for participating, available hours and references. Information collected about the youth should include their reasons for wanting to be involved and the qualities that they would like to see in a mentor. Youth and mentor agreements spell out the purpose and expectations of the mentoring program, its duration, and the expected participation; and secure commitment in writing from mentors, the youth and their parents or guardians. Mentoring programs need action plans that outline specific program, mentor and youth goals and a system for tracking time and the types of interactions between mentors and youth.

RECRUITING AND SCREENING VOLUNTEERS

Inappropriate screening of volunteers who wish to become mentors is the area of greatest potential liability for youth mentoring programs. Most individuals who volunteer to become mentors are interested in building close, positive mentoring relationships with young people. However, within any pool of potential volunteers there exists the possibility that some volunteer with inappropriate intentions. All mentoring programs must develop practical screening tools and guidelines to ensure that children and youth are safe. Because children and youth are vulnerable, particularly those who face social problems such as poverty or who have experienced difficult life experiences, screening mentors is critical to protect them from individuals who may cause them harm (Bisanz et al., 2003, Klinck et al., 2005).

Screening practices should focus on ensuring that the mentor is safe, guarantee that the mentor can commit to the expectations of the relationship and ensure that the mentor understands that the relationship must focus on building a friendship. Screening takes time, but is an important first step in securing mentors.

"Mentors require patience and understanding."

how?

Once a volunteer expresses interest, systems must be in place to act quickly and perform the necessary screening and security checks to ensure safety for children while keeping potential mentors interested. Recruitment and screening need to be culturally appropriate to increase the number of Aboriginal mentors, and the criteria must be flexible enough to allow people to be mentors who have overcome difficult life challenges but have relevant experiences to share (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005). Screening can be determined through interviews, personal or professional reference checks and financial and criminal clearances. Agencies or organizations that require background checks for all volunteers ensure a safer environment for children (Novotney et al., 2000). Desirable characteristics of mentors include commitment, availability, trustworthiness, maturity, strong communication skills, respect, financial stability and civility (Bisanz et al., 2003).

ORIENTING AND TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

Adequate mentor preparation is an important risk management issue to ensure that safe, appropriate mentoring relationships develop. It is important to orient volunteers to the program and provide training before they begin working with youth. Volunteers must also be supported through continued training opportunities while they remain actively involved in mentoring to build a sense of community and keep them well informed about what is happening. Involving Elders and others in the program is important because they have the necessary skills and knowledge to work with young people. Mentors need and appreciate ongoing training to support them in their roles as they learn to work more successfully with children and youth, especially training that covers appropriate roles and boundaries. Training should address safety and emergency procedures such as the use of seatbelts if mentors will be transporting youth, and guidelines for reporting suspected child abuse or bringing health or mental health issues to the attention of the appropriate service providers.

The initial training should explain the role and responsibilities of the program and the mentor; demonstrate what effective mentoring looks like, communicate how an Aboriginal mentoring program supports young people in their communities; outline program policies and logistics, statutory requirements, confidentiality, accident/emergency procedures and special needs of the children. Additional training should be available on topics of possible mentor concern such as cultural competency, conflict resolution, understanding child development and career mentoring strategies.

MATCHING YOUTH WITH MENTORS

The criteria for matching mentors should include a consideration of the genders of the mentor and young person, shared interests, the mentor's attitudes and temperament, how close the mentor lives to the young person, the young person's special needs and the mentor's special talents. Research suggests that matching based on race and socioeconomic factors should also be considered, yet the mentor's qualities and behaviours are the most significant because the mentor has the greatest responsibility for the success of the match. Respect for the young person and a long-term commitment are equally essential. Regardless of the criteria used to match volunteer mentors with young people, it is critical to obtain the parent's or guardian's approval of the match.

SUPERVISING AND SUPPORTING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

The program coordinator is primarily responsible for supervising and supporting mentoring. Because the standard of care is defined by the activity, the supervision should be appropriate to the level of activity involved. Generally, group mentoring requires less supervision from a program coordinator than a one-to-one mentoring relationship does.

Policies and procedures should be developed for the sign-in/-out procedures, monitoring the drop-off and pick-up activities and supervising the program facilities and mentoring activities. Mentors should check in with the program coordinator regularly, preferably weekly, especially during the first few months. Monitoring the relationship during the early stages is particularly important to detect and resolve problems and initiate termination processes, if necessary, earlier rather than later to minimize harm to young people. Coordinator contact with mentors should document concerns and follow-up action.

ASSESSING RISKS

Because mentoring programs involve working with children, their safety must be protected and ensured in all aspects of the program, from screening volunteer mentors to structured activities, risks, legal concerns and liability insurance. Adequate mentor preparation is an important risk management issue to ensure that the mentoring is safe and appropriate. Mentoring program coordinators are responsible for all aspects of their programs and must develop a system to manage risk. Establishing clear risk management policies and procedures and maintaining detailed and accurate records will assist programs in protecting the youth involved, their volunteers and their programs.

Policies and procedures must be in place to file and securely store the results of volunteer background checks and screening, references and interview notes. Guidelines should be developed for documenting unusual incidents and any follow-up action that is taken.

Comprehensive liability insurance coverage that meets the program's needs and legal requirements is essential. Because legal liability and insurance must be part of the plan, consider partnering with an existing community agency. Liability issues must also be taken into account if mentors will be transporting children in their vehicles. Programs need to include additional motor vehicle and insurance checks if this is the case. Parent or guardian permission must also be obtained.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

To ensure the quality and effectiveness of the program, regular evaluations are necessary. Copies of evaluations and results should also be kept for future reference.



who?

Many volunteers are needed to operate a successful mentoring program in an Aboriginal community. It is important to identify who will be interested in helping establish the mentoring program, who will volunteer to mentor, which parents will want their children involved, which children or youth will be interested, who runs related programs in the community, who can work with you in pursuing this program and with whom you need to partner to be successful.

IDENTIFYING YOUTH

Mentoring programs rely heavily on parent referrals; yet youth whose parents are unaware of these programs or who do not fully understand what they have to offer may never be referred (Bisanz et al., 2003; Herrera & Gale, 2002). Therefore, in identifying youth for a mentoring program, consider those who have no other natural mentors, those not served by other programs or agencies and those who the program is capable of serving. The age of the young people may be a consideration, especially if the program has an academic aim such as keeping students in school or exploring careers. Some mentoring programs focus on girls, others on boys. Some mentoring programs are specifically for youth with disabilities while other programs may focus on social skills development or helping youth build and strengthen interpersonal relationships. The focus of your community mentoring program will determine the youth who need to be identified.

ESTABLISHING AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Since mentoring programs are new to most Aboriginal communities, ongoing supervision is necessary to ensure that the program is being appropriately administered. According to the Aboriginal Mentoring Pilot Project Evaluation Report, community awareness is key to the recruitment of mentors and Elders to ensure vital participation from youth and other individuals within the community (Alberta Children's Services, 2006). The formation of a community advisory group for guidance and support is essential for success and sustainability, especially for programs that involve outside organizations (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005). Community-centered models are most successful if they determine what the community needs in terms of information and capacity building as effective interventions for youth (Bensen, et al., 2004). The members of the advisory committee should reflect the key areas of expertise that are needed, including Elders and advisors for legal, financial, organizational and program management matters. Advisory committees for community mentoring programs help ensure that the programs are delivered as intended. The best committees have experience delivering programs for children and youth (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

HONOURING THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

For Aboriginal youth, positive and rewarding connections to parents, communities, teachers and schools help them develop resilience. Programs which invite these individuals to serve on advisory committees help ensure that programs have mechanisms in place for monitoring and supervision. Mentoring programs must be sure to fully engage parents by inviting them to information sessions and asking them to evaluate the program (Alberta Children's Services, 2006). According to the Aboriginal Mentoring Pilot Project Evaluation Report (2006), programs that are the most successful ensure parents, youth and the community are aware of the project and are asked for their input around issues of priorities and activities (Alberta Children's Services, 2006).

The most effective mentoring programs consider both the community and culture, are developed in collaboration with community members and build on existing strengths and programs within the community. The mentoring relationship should include not only the mentor and the young person, but also his or her family and the community to ensure success. Family members should be encouraged to participate when practical, and parent involvement should be promoted though special events. The ability of children from large families to participate in mentoring programs can be problematic because of transportation issues and the need to care for other children while they are participating in a program (Bisanz et al., 2003; Klinck et al., 2005). These concerns should be considered while developing mentoring programs.

"When youth speak in their voices or through drawings, through poems, through tears, the world becomes a stronger place."

"To help adults to realize we are not all bad. To have people believe that youth all over the world can and are going to change the way we think and the way the world sees us as the future."

"Be non-judgmental in your approach to help foster a trusting relationship."

"A mentor is a person who is always there for you, inspires you to do the best you can, and encourages you to keep working to make your dreams come true."

ENROLLING VOLUNTEERS

When decisions have been made about the characteristics of the youth who are to be served, the criteria for who to recruit as mentors can be established. Identifying the youth population will determine the type of people to recruit as mentors. For instance, a program geared to elementary school children who could benefit from improved social skills and learning about traditional beliefs and customs may target senior citizens as mentors. Involving schools and community organizations provides opportunities to involve older, retired individuals as mentors. Nearly all programs depend on word-of-mouth advertising; therefore recruiting should involve primarily personal contacts from Elders and community members (Novotney et al., 2000), businesses, churches and service organizations. Mentors are generally volunteers, which is an important distinction between mentors and those in professional helping relationships such as teachers, guidance counsellors and social workers. This voluntary aspect is powerful because it signifies that mentors are offering their support and assistance freely. There is also an inherent social and emotional aspect to mentoring, and most mentors volunteer for altruistic reasons and personal satisfaction.

In rural areas, being flexible and providing options that match potential volunteers' schedules and interests is important. Having to travel long distances to mentor or be mentored is problematic and makes it difficult for mentors to meet with young people. Time is essential to building trust; therefore, the length of time that mentors are willing to commit is important, as is their ability to become involved and stay committed to the relationship. Relationships that are caring, respectful and stable over time provide the greatest benefits to children.

Mentors who work with Aboriginal youth must have an appreciation for the knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture, history, values, heritage, spiritual beliefs and the social context (Klinck et al., 2005; Schissel & Fedec, 2001). Because Aboriginal children are strongly impacted by humour, mentors who have a sense of humour are the most effective (MacCallum, et al., 2005; MacCallum & Vella, 2006). Canadian research suggests that mentors should be Aboriginal and that the programs should include the youth's family, traditional values and culture, and adequate resources for sustainability, including transportation for mentors and youth.



checklist

FOR DEVELOPING AN ABORIGINAL MENTORING PROGRAM



1. Do the goals and objectives for your program include:

- ○ An assessment of your community's need for a mentoring program?
- ○ The what, why, how and who of your mentoring program?
- ○ Input from Elders, community members and potential volunteers?
- ○ A realistic, attainable and easy-to-understand plan for mentoring?
- ○ Goals, objectives and timelines for all aspects of mentoring?
- ○ A plan for fund raising and developing resources?
- ○ A focus for mentors and youth?



2. Does your recruitment plan for mentors and youth include:

- ○ Strategies to identify potential mentors in your community?
- ○ Ways to involve Elders and community members in securing volunteers?
- ○ Asking parents, schools and social service agencies to refer youth?
- ○ A description of eligibility, screening process and suitability requirements?
- ○ Involving families and community members in the program?
- ○ Expected time commitment from volunteers and youth?
- ○ Benefits and rewards they can expect from mentoring?



3. Does your screening procedures for mentors include:

- ○ An application process and review?
- ○ Criminal records check from local RCMP detachment?
- ○ A face-to-face interview and home visit if youth will be in the home?
- ○ A character reference check?
- ○ A driving record check if the mentor will be transporting youth?
- ○ A discussion about the motivation for volunteering to mentor?
- ○ Successful completion of training and orientation?



4. Have you planned an orientation for mentors and youth that includes:

- ○ An overview of your mentoring program?
- ○ Orientation to the program?
- ○ Expectations and restrictions?
- ○ How to get the most out of the mentoring relationship?
- ○ Mentor's role and role descriptions?
- ○ Program policies regarding contact with youth and families?
- ○ Cultural sensitivity and appreciation training?
- ○ Do's and don'ts of relationship management?
- ○ Confidentiality and liability information?
- ○ Crisis management/problem-solving resources?
- ○ Communications skills development?
- ○ Ongoing training?

5. Have you developed a strategy for matching volunteers and youth that:

- ○ Links with the program's statement of purpose?
- ○ Encourages a commitment?
- ○ Considers gender; age; availability; life experience; temperament?
- ○ Includes signed agreements by mentor and youth to the mentoring?
- ○ Obtains agreement of youth's parent, or guardian to the match?

6. How will you monitor your program to ensure:

- ○ Consistent, regularly scheduled meetings with staff, mentors and youth?
- ○ The program has ongoing assessment in place?
- ○ Written records are maintained? (Including appropriate insurance)
- ○ Regular input from Elders, family and significant others?
- ○ Procedures are in place to manage grievances, praise and problems?

7. Have you developed plans for support, recognition and retention that include:

- ○ A formal kick-off event?
- ○ Ongoing support for volunteer mentors, participants and others, and ways to disseminate information?
- ○ Regular communication with mentors, supporters and funders?
- ○ Ongoing training and development for mentors including
- ○ Opportunities to discuss relevant issues?
- ○ Networking and social gatherings with different groups or
- ○ Organizations as needed?
- ○ Annual recognition and appreciation events?

8. Have you thought about how to handle mentoring relationships that end including confidential exit interviews to debrief:

- ○ Youth, mentors and staff?
- ○ About policies for any future contact between the mentor and youth?

9. How will you:

- ○ Analyze your program and relationships?
- ○ Evaluate program criteria and purpose?
- ○ Assess the needs of Elders, mentors, youth, community partners and program supporters?

Adapted From Mentoring Canada's [2007] Building Blocks Of Quality Mentoring Programs: Effective Mentoring Checklist

key contacts

Youth Strategies Branch
Alberta Children's Services
10th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2N2
(780) 415-0085
Website: http://www.child.gov.ab.ca

Alberta International, Intergovernmental And Aboriginal Relations
19th floor, Commerce Place
10155 - 102 Street N.W.
Edmonton, AB T5J 4G8
(780) 415-6141
Website: http://www.aand.gov.ab.ca

COMMUNITY AGENCIES SUCH AS:
- Community and Cultural Groups
- Church and Religious Organizations
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- United Way
- YMCA/YWCA

Tribal or regional organizations and Aboriginal Friendship Centres as listed in:
A Guide to Aboriginal Organizations in Alberta (October 2006) Publication of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (New Ministry: International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, December 2006). Available from: http://www.aand.gov.ab.ca/AANDFlash/Files/Aboriginal_Orgs_Guide-Oct2006.pdf

Aboriginal Capacity and Developmental Research Environments Network (ACADRE)
The Alberta ACADRE Network
300, 8625 - 112 Street
Campus Tower, University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 0H1
Telephone: (780) 492-1827
Fax: (780) 492-7123
E-mail: acadre@ualberta.ca
Website: http://www.acadre.ualberta.ca/

Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association
10336 - 121 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5N 1K8
Telephone: (780) 423-3138
Fax: (780) 425-6277
E-mail: anfca7@telusplanet.net
Website: http://www.albertafriendshipcentres.ca/

Alberta Mental Health Board
Corporate Office, Suite 700, Manulife Place
10180 - 101 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3S4
Telephone: (780) 422-2233
Fax: (780) 422-2472
Website: http://www.amhb.ab.ca/

Aboriginal Youth & Family Well-Being and Education Society
11202 - 131 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5M 1C3
Telephone: (780) 413-9360
Fax: (780) 413-9363
E-mail: ayf@aboriginalyouth.ca
Website: http://www.aboriginalyouth.ca/

The Aboriginal Youth Network
Box 34007, Kingsway Mall PO
Edmonton, Alberta T5G 3G4
Telephone: (780) 459-1884 (ext. 438)
Toll Free: (800) 459-1884
Fax: (780) 458-1883
Website: http://www.ayn.ca/

Addictions and Mental Health First Nations and Inuit Health Branch
Health Canada
730, 9700 Jasper Ave
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4C3
Telephone: (780) 495-2692
Fax: (780) 495-2687
Website: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/index_e.html

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch
Alberta Education
9th Floor, 44 Capital Boulevard
10044 - 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 5E6
Telephone: (780) 415-9300
Fax: (780) 415-9306
Website: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/index_e.html

Native Counselling Services of Alberta

- 10975 - 124 Street
 Edmonton, Alberta T5M 0H9
 Telephone: (780) 451-4002
 Fax: (780) 428-0187
 E-mail: admin@ncsa.ca
 Website: http://www.ncsa.ca/
- 206, 2915 - 21 Street NE
 Calgary, Alberta T2E 7T1
 Telephone: (403) 237-7850
 Fax: (403) 237-7857
 E-mail: calgary@ncsa.ca

websites

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada: www.bbbsc.ca

Alberta Mentor Foundation for Youth: www.amfy.org

Mentoring Canada: www.mentoringcanada.ca

Mentors Canada: www.mentors.ca/mentorlinks

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America: www.bbbsa.org/about about.html

National Mentoring Center: www.nwrel.org/mentoring

National Mentoring Partnership: www.mentoring.org

Designing and Planning: www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/design.php

Manage a Program for Success: www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/management.php

Structure Effective Program Operations: www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/operations.php

Establish Evaluation Criteria and Methods: www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/evaluation.php

Online Tool Kit: www.mentoring.org/eeptoolkit

Public/Private Ventures: www.ppv.org

Search Institute: www.search-institute.org

Volunteer Canada: www.volunteer.ca

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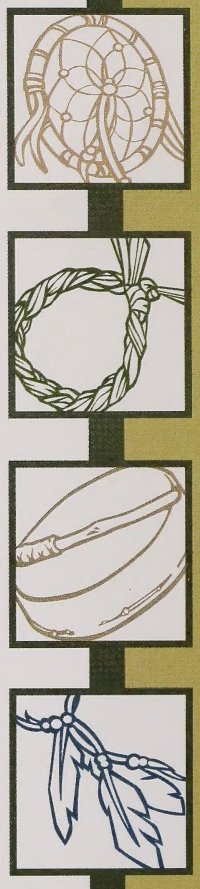
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